THE SPLENDOR OF THE WORD'S TREE: THE ANGELIC LANGUAGE OF SALVATION IN JACOPONE OF TODI

•

by Armando Maggi

The Franciscan Jacopone of Todi (1236–1306), "one of the greatest mystical poets of the Middle Ages," is still a spiritual and literary dilemma.[1] In the past, his tormented and adventurous biography fostered an erroneous interpretation of Jacopone as a passionate but uncultivated visionary for whom poetry was an impulsive and unpolished form of religious expression.[2] A layman who underwent a dramatic conversion after his wife's sudden death, Jacopone became a Franciscan friar in 1278. Having embraced the apocalyptic views of the Spirituals, he endorsed the so-called Longhezza Manifesto, which rejected the election of Boniface VIII, and was thus excommunicated and imprisoned. In an underground cell of the monastery of San Fortunato at Todi Jacopone composed some of his most involving and accomplished lauds. In the Italian tradition, only the poems of the friar Tommaso Campanella, who was tortured and imprisoned by the Catholic Church for more than twenty years at the end of the sixteenth century, match the intense beauty of Jacopone's *Lauds*. Both Jacopone and Campanella's poetics are deeply apocalyptic. This aspect of Jacopone's poetry will become of central importance in the last section of this essay.[3]

As Bernard McGinn reminds us, "in the manner of many of the vernacular theologians of the later Middle Ages, [Jacopone] was far more learned in the mystical tradition than he lets on."[4] However, the evident difficulties concerning the language of his *Lauds* (a theological and mystical tradition in Latin translated into the oral syntax of Jacopone's Umbrian vernacular) essentially mirror the reservations many scholars still have about the cohesion of his mystical system. If, as Giovanni Pozzi underscores, Jacopone's poetic language is polysemous,[5] the spiritual view stemming from his lauds is usually seen as contradictory and unsystematic. But why does Jacopone write poetry? This seemingly obvious question has not yet received a complete answer. Are his lauds meant to vent or give voice to his anger, memories of a past mystical joy,

[1]Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York 1998) 125. My most sincere thanks to Prof. McGinn for his comments and suggestions.

[2]The most recent biography of Jacopone is Franco Suitner, *Iacopone da Todi* (Rome 1999). In particular, on Bonaventure's influence on Jacopone, 67–73.

[3]Cf. Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist* (New York 1996) 169–170 and 229. On the Spiritual Franciscans, see Bernard McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (New York 1979) 149–158.

[4]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (n. 1 above) 125–126.

[5]Giovanni Pozzi, "Jacopone poeta?" *Alternatim* (Milan 1996) 77. In n. 74, Pozzi reminds us that Jacopone finally entered the canon of Italian literature when the philologist Gianfranco Contini included a selection of his verses in his seminal *Poeti del duecento* (Milan 1960) 61–66. For a summary of the contemporary debate on Jacopone's *Lauds*, see Silvestro Nessi, "Lo stato attuale della critica iacoponica," *Atti del convegno storico iacoponico*, ed. Enrico Menestò (Spoleto 1992) 37–64.

religious resentment, or are they expression of a broader mystical system? In other words, what is the role of poetic writing in Jacopone's mysticism? According to several Umbrian codices, Jacopone wrote his lauds "pro consolatione et profectu novitiorum studentium" ("for the consolation and spiritual growth of the novices").[6] This is of course far from being a fully convincing explanation. The title of Giovanni Pozzi's important article ("Is Jacopone a poet?") bluntly confirms and summarizes the still open debate on Jacopone's poetics.

For many scholars, the essential contradiction in Jacopone's mystical writing is the apparently unsettled relationship between apophasis and language.[7] Although the difficulty of blending contemplation and expression is one of the basic topoi of mystical literature in every culture and age, scholars resolve the impasse concerning Jacopone's *Lauds* by dividing them into two distinct areas: on the one hand, his moral and political compositions, his direct attacks against the corruption of society and the church; on the other, his more traditional and private attempts to recount his ecstatic experiences, obsessively focused on the sudden irruption or withdrawal of divine love.[8] On the one hand, an embittered preacher; on the other, a more traditional mystic who struggles with words and silence.

Before we proceed, a few brief historical references are necessary. Let us remember that, in order to understand the meaning of medieval lauds, we must relate them to the popular movements of the Flagellants, whose spontaneous and highly dramatized processions are one of the most fascinating phenomena of medieval apocalyptic spirituality.[9] As Ignazio Baldelli explains in his seminal study on this subject, the Flagellants first gathered in 1260 in Perugia, where the most important and comprehensive collection of lauds was put together between 1320 and 1335.[10] Along with the Flagellants, we must mention the Laudesi, lay groups who devoted themselves to the chant of lauds and whose presence is first documented in 1267 in the Sienese convent of Saint Dominic.[11] The name "laud" itself refers to that section of the liturgy called Lauds (between Matins and Prime of the daily hours), which includes Psalms 148 (*Laudate Dominum de coelis*) and 150 (*Laudate Dominum in sactis eius*).[12] Giorgio Varanini has pointed out that in the *Legenda maior*, a text we will analyze in the second part of this essay, Bonaventure connects Francis's *Cantica*, certainly one of the

[6]Lino Leonardi and Francesco Santi, "La letteratura religiosa," *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. Enrico Malato (Rome 1995) 1.372.

[7]See, for instance, Gianni Mussini, "Introduzione," in Jacopone da Todi, *Laude* (Casale Monferrato 1990) 36–39.

[8]Two modern editions of Jacopone's *Lauds* are available: Iacopone da Todi, *Laude, Trattato e Detti*, ed. Franca Ageno (Florence 1953); and Iacopone da Todi, *Laude*, ed. Franco Mancini (Bari 1974). In this essay I refer to the more recent one, although I have consulted both texts. For the theme of divine love as an ecstatic experience, see Elémire Zolla, "Preface," *Jacopone da Todi: The Lauds*, trans. Serge and Elizabeth Hughes (New York 1982) xiii; Natalino Sapegno, *Frate Iacopone* (Florence 1985) 126–155; Alvaro Cacciotti, *Amor sacro e amor profano in Jacopone da Todi* (Rome 1989) 193–215.

[9]Cf. Leonardi and Santi, "La letteratura religiosa" (n. 6 above) 1.376–377; Franco Mancini, "Interpretazione storica del laudario" and "La metrica," in Iacopone, *Laude* (n. 8 above) 362–366 and 372–375. Cf. Enrico Menestò, "Le laude drammatiche di Iacopone da Todi: Fonti e struttura," *Le laudi drammatiche umbre delle origini* (Viterbo 1981) 105–140; Franca Brambilla Ageno, *Storia della laude lirica* (Parma 1965–1966).

[10]Ignazio Baldelli, *Medioevo volgare da Montecassino all'Umbria* (Bari 1971) 324–325 and 349.

[11]Leonardi and Santi, "La letteratura religiosa" (n. 6 above) 362–363.

first lauds of the thirteenth century, to the "laudes more prophetae David."[13]

As far as our study is concerned, the collective and potentially theatrical nature of this religious genre is of central relevance. A laud is first and foremost an invocation that a group of "brothers and sisters" directs to the divinity in a state of spiritual emergency.[14] Like a psalm, a laud is an anonymous chant, a prayer, an expression of sorrow, and a request for help. If the psalms foreshadow the Word's incarnation and sacrifice for all of humanity, a laud inevitably becomes a performance, a theatrical reenactment and memorial of the Word's human experience, primarily his persecution and crucifixion.[15] This aspect is particularly visible in the fourteenth-century collection of lauds of Perugia and in Jacopone's *Donna del Paradiso*. Being both a prayer and a performance, a laud exists in the here and now of its recital.

It is a given that Jacopone's texts often have an unmistakably oral connotation; that is, they ask to be perceived as monologues or sermons held in the present of our reading.[16] Even when the poem is written in the third person, its oral rhetoric always posits a speaker addressing us, its audience. Being a hypothetical conversation, a typical poem by Jacopone is either a monologue, a confession a speaker makes to us, as if he expected both our response and our absolution, or a conversation we are asked to overhear. These dialogic poems usually stage two exemplary and contrastive views (good versus evil, purity versus corruption). In these openly didactic texts, the reader "hears" the "good" speaker/preacher sternly reprimand his "evil" or "fallen" interlocutor. See, for instance, laud 61 in which a speaker ridicules a corpse lying in a tomb. Every other quatrain opens with a rhetorical question coming from the sarcastic visitor. For instance, "where is your brazen tongue?" ("Or uv'è la lengua cotanto tagliente?" v. 39). "I have lost the tongue with which I spoke and caused so much division" ("Perdut' ho la lengua co la qual parlava/ e molta descordia con essa ordenava," vv. 43–44), the corpse acknowledges. The corpse's language of falsity and death has followed him to the grave. In the closing quatrain, the preacher turns from the corpse to us, the readers, ("worldly man," v. 79) and reminds us that we shall soon join the corpse in the tomb.

As it will become evident at the end of this essay, the core of Jacopone's mysticism, "based on a bedrock of Franciscan theological and mystical motifs," lies in the assumption that a laud is a praise/prayer directed to the Word *through* us, that is, "we" grant the poet/speaker's love statement its linguistic completion.[17] Jacopone's mystical

[12]Giorgio Varanini, *Lingua e letteratura italiana dei primi secoli* (Pisa 1994) 173.

[13]Varanini, *Lingua e letteratura* (n. 12 above) 173.

[14]Cf. Adriano Magli and Anna Marina Storoni Piazza, "Lo sviluppo delle laudi drammatiche in rapporto al concetto di spazio e tempo," *Le laudi drammatiche umbre delle origini* (Viterbo 1980) 201–215. In particular, on Bonaventure and the Flagellants: "In every page [of Bonaventure], we find a reference to the concept of life as pilgrimage, to God's love as an identification with him, and to Truth as "summae veritatis et primae repraesentatio" ... The two temporal categories (time present and the eternal time of the Scriptures) blend in the *Laudesi*, even before the dramatization of the laud. Let us keep in mind that the *Flagellants'* extraordinary impact was also due to their prophetic character" (208–209).

[15]Baldelli, *Medioevo volgare* (n. 10 above) 357–358. Cf. Silvano Maggiani, "La liturgia e la lauda drammatica, espressione di liminalità," *Le laude drammatiche umbre delle origini* (n. 9 above) 65–79.

[16]Mancini touches upon this aspect of Jacopone's writings in his "note" following his critical edition: Jacopone, *Laude* (n. 8 above) 352.

[17]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (n. 1 above) 126.

poetry is indeed founded on a unique blending of apophasis and verbalization. The conventional contrast between visionary experience and its subsequent, always imperfect and unsatisfactory, verbal description does not apply to Jacopone. As we will see, for Jacopone silence and expression are two facets of one and only one mystical enlightenment. In his poetic appropriation of Bonaventure's theology, Jacopone believes that for the "concordant" or "hierarchic" man language is the primary and natural manifestation of his silent dialogue with the Word. According to Jacopone, the enlightened man cannot help but communicate his inner concordance to us.

In the memory of Francis, the perfect "hierarchic" man, Jacopone and the Spirituals also find the answer to the apocalyptic urgency of their time. "The moon is dark and the sun is clouded; I see the stars falling from the sky," Jacopone writes in laud 6.[18] For Jacopone, to save and to be saved means to learn how to utter Francis's angelic idiom. We will see that, read in the light of Bonaventure's apocalyptic *Legenda maior*, Jacopone's poetry is both invocation and memorial, both prayer to and in the name of the angelic man, and remembrance of his message of repentance and salvation.[19] In some of his most complex lauds, Jacopone's poetic "I" in fact speaks at once as and to the "hierarchic" man. No essential contrast thus exists between the two opposite poles of Jacopone's poetics, his scornful sermons on the corruption of the popes and the lyrical descriptions of sudden mystical raptures.

The essential importance of linguistic expression is clearly laid out in laud 2, one of Jacopone's least analyzed texts. This poem opens with an anguished "brother" lamenting love's unbearable heat (vv. 3–4). He can't escape love's persecution for the cross is stuck in his heart. A second "brother" reminds him that love is the highest "pleasure" and thus he should not try to run away from it (vv. 7–10). If this second speaker portrays love as a "flowered cross" (v. 15), a "leading light" (vv. 23–25), and first of all as the gift of a "delectable" eloquence thanks to which he can now "preach to many people" (vv. 33–34), the first brother perceives love as a wounding cross (v. 15), a "blinding light" (v. 27), and primarily as a mute abyss that has made him incapable of any dialogue (vv. 35–36). This laud itself is an impossible interaction in that the two speakers cannot reach any common ground or mutual understanding, and basically do not understand each other (vv. 55–62). Even though he has been granted the grace of eloquence, the second brother is unable to overcome the first speaker's view of love as silence and persecution. The laud paradoxically functions as two dialogical monologues, that is, as the representation of language as a natural and impossible request. However, since Jacopone's lauds usually disclose their didactic message in the last stanza, the suffering brother's final statement may reflect the author's personal position. If the joyous brother has tasted love as an intoxicating wine, he (the first, disconsolate speaker) knows love as a sour "must" ("mosto," vv. 59–60). In the long run, he concludes, must warps the strongest barrel. "Must" is at once what love/wine exudes during its intoxication/ fermentation and its "sour" remembrance; that is, it is the remnants of a past love intoxication. In other words, "must" signifies both the ex-

[18]Jacopone, *Laude* (n. 8 above) 27, vv. 4–5.

[19]On Bonaventure's apocalypticism, see Richard K. Emmerson and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia 1992) 36–75.

pression and the silence of love.

In some of his most celebrated poems, Jacopone illustrates his conception of love through the tree metaphor. In laud 79 ("O Amor, che mme ami"), the mystic begs love to grant him the faculty of love, for only love can mirror and respond to love. In particular, verses 4 through 7 state that love's love is an impossible request in that, when the beloved perceives love's love and "climbs up your [love's] branches" (v. 6), he only comes to perceive his longing for love, his being distant and ungrateful toward love's love. In other words, love's tree is the "arising" (climbing up) of being as yearning.[20] This essential meaning is reiterated and expanded in laud 89 ("Amor de caritate, perché m'ài ssì feruto?"), one of Jacopone's most quoted and analyzed poems. Love's love is a wound, a consuming flame (vv. 3–5). Having annihilated all "desires, senses, and feelings" (v. 20), love has planted a "love tree" in the middle of the mystic's heart (vv. 23–24).[21] Love's love, his flame and persecution, is an inner tree the mystic carries within himself but is unable to climb (vv. 44–48). This "tree of life" (laud 92, v. 452) is "the splendor" residing in the mystic's heart (laud 92, v. 4). Love's tree informs and transforms those (the mystic) who have been visited by love's request (laud 79, vv. 100–108).

The tree metaphor lies at the core of Jacopone's mysticism. Any attempt to fathom Jacopone's apocalyptic spirituality can only stem from a close analysis of those lauds founded on the connection between love and the tree image. Let us remember that, as Pozzi suggests, a closer analysis of the *Lauds*' "doctrinal context" may bring to the fore "a homogeneous spiritual project."[22] However, a hypothetical mystical "project" in Jacopone does not necessarily correspond to a unified poetic expression. It is undeniable that no single laud works as a clear manifesto or exegetical synthesis of Jacopone's mysticism. As Bernard McGinn stresses, this is particularly visible in a set of lauds that, formulating "an itinerary of the soul's ascent to God,"[23] revolve around the topos of the mystical tree (lauds 77, 78, and 84).[24] Rather than analyzing Jacopone's poems as individual, and incomplete, theoretical structures, we should read them as facets or reflections of a single mystical discourse deeply grounded on Bonaventure's philosophy. Indeed, we could go so far as to say that Jacopone's compositions are poetic interpretations of some of Bonaventure's key theses and texts, first of all the *Legenda maior* from which Jacopone borrows his most powerful apocalyptic images. In order to assess the meaning of the image "tree" in Jacopone, it is thus necessary to make the above three lauds converse with each other. An understanding of Jacopone's concept of "tree" emerges from a cluster of texts, the above three lauds plus a number of references or echoes from previous and subsequent lauds. As we will see, read in this manner, "tree" is the most cogent symbol and synthesis of Jacopone's apocalyptic

[20]This laud concludes with another reference to love's "branch" ("rama," 79.111), the symbol of divine charity ("carità").

[21]Kurt Ruh mentions the "love tree" in Jacopone in *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik* (Munich 1993) 2.479.

[22]Pozzi (n. 5 above) 75.

[23]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (n. 1 above) 127.

[24]The best essay on the mystical tree in Jacopone is still Agide Gottardi's "'L'albero spirituale' in Iacopone da Todi," *Rassegna critica della letteratura italiana* 20 (1915) 1–28. I am deeply indebted to Gottardi's fine study.

project.

Laud 77 opens with a prologue in which the poetic "'I" lays out his excruciating ambivalence vis-à-vis language. "I thought of speaking" ("Aiome pensato de parlare") he confesses on verse 5. But in the following line, the speaker recognizes that he lacks the wisdom ("senno") necessary "for a big speech" (v. 6). Silence would be more appropriate, but his will ("volere") forces his reason ("el rasonare") toward expression (v. 9). In the second and final stanza, the speaker acknowledges that he simply cannot help but speak, even though speech may expose him to criticism and condemnation (vv. 11–14). If the "thought of speaking" visits the speaker's mind as something at once internal and external to the mind itself (a longing that overcomes the speaker's intellect), reason knows that the speaker will be held responsible for a speech that in fact transcends him. We may say that the "thought of speaking" initiates and verbalizes a process of recollection.[25]

After the prologue, the poet opens his treatise (*tractatus*) by positing a hypothetical identification between the heavenly harmony created by the three angelic hierarchies and a human being that has attained a perfect similar "concordance" within himself ("concordanza," v. 28).[26] However, the poet reminds us that, before potentially reflecting the angelic system, a human being is an image ("emmagen," v. 22) of the divinity himself. Not only does the speaker see an ontological similarity between a "concordant" man and an angelic being, he also implies that, in order to acquire his inner concordance, a human being must progress through the whole angelic chorus mirroring the divinity in heaven. If heaven itself is made of the three angelic hierarchies, a human being may come to embody a similar symmetry. "I believe I have found such a man," Jacopone writes at the end of this introductory stanza ("e pareme de averelo trovato," v. 29). This concordant man, as we will see later, is of course Francis of Assisi. In his transformation from "image" to "similitude" of the Word, Francis also acquired a new, angelic idiom. "The angelic Francis," our "new patriarch," as Jacopone calls him in laud 40, is the new tree of wisdom, whose firm roots convey a new (angelic) message of salvation.[27] The articulation of Francis's new language is the sole means to face and transcend the imminent end of time.

Carrying the term "hierarchy" from the first to the second stanza, in laud 77 the

[25]On the relationship between memory, intellect, and will in Bonaventure, see *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 4.1–3 in *S. Bonaventurae opera omnia*, 10 vols. (Quaracchi 1882–1902) (henceforth Bonaventure, *Opera omnia*) 5.306. Cf. Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure. Mystical Writings* (New York 1999) 87–88.

[26]Cf. Bonaventure's concept of "concordantia." As Gilson explains, for Bonaventure "liberum arbitrium" (free will) is neither a being nor a word, but rather the connection or relationship ("concordantia") between "ratio" or "intellectus" (*potentia cognitiva*) and "voluntas" or "affectus" (*potentia affectiva*). See Etienne Gilson, *La philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (Paris 1943) 329. See *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. 25, q. 3, *conclusio* in Bonaventure, *Opera omnia*, 2.598–600. "Liberum arbitrium," Bonaventure explains in the conclusion of the following *quaestio*, is a "habitus" and not a "potentia" (2.601).

The parallel between mystical enlightenment and angelic orders finds in Thomas Gallus its first theorization. As Bernard McGinn points out, "Gallus's Dionysianism rests on two significant innovations: a reinterpretation of the ascent to the unknown God which places the experience of affective love above all cognition, and a process whereby the angelic hierarchies are treated primarily as the inner powers of the soul to be energized and set in order to achieve loving union" (McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* [n. 1 above] 80).

[27]Jacopone, *Laude* (n. 8 above) 113, 1 and 55.

speaker holds that a "perfect man has three hierarchies" (v. 31), which correspond both to the three angelic levels and to Bonaventure's "three hierarchical acts," i.e., "purgation," "illumination," and "perfection."[28] If man is God's image and a perfect or concordant man becomes a similitude of the angelic structure inhabiting and sustaining heaven, man's angelic concordance is symbolized ("se figura," v. 42) by the image of a tree. In other words, the image of a tree works as an emblem or vestige, the visible reminder of an invisible, albeit real, identification (concordant man–angelic hierarchies). We may thus infer that in laud 77 Jacopone describes three fundamental forms of inner visibility: symbol ("figura"), image ("emmagen"), and similitude ("simiglianza," v. 22).[29]

In the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure posits a direct connection between the mind's three-step hierarchy (purgation, illumination, perfection) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, charity), which accompany the mind through the three levels of visibility (symbol, image, similitude).[30] But to proceed through the three theological virtues, Bonaventure writes, man needs the mediation of Jesus Christ, "Verbum incarnatum," the tree of life placed at the center of heaven.[31] This is the theoretical foundation behind Jacopone's subsequent analysis of the symbolic tree/concordant man. Echoing Bonaventure's *Commentarium in Sapientiam*, Jacopone explains that, if the roots symbolize the concordant man's humility ("vilitate," v. 52), the stump corresponds to his faith, the trunk is his hope, and the point where the branch springs forth is his charity (vv. 61, 71–72, 81–82).[32]

In Jacopone's interpretation of Bonaventure's inner hierarchy, charity enables the transformation from human to angelic nature (from the trunk to the branches). The arising of the higher section of the man/tree is in fact an angelic visitation, which re-enacts the initial interaction between "ratio," "voluntas," and "liberum arbitrium." This first set of three branches corresponds to the first angelic order. Jacopone reminds us that an angel (messenger of a noble nature, v. 96) grants the mind "infallible thoughts" ("penser' senza fallura," v. 98), which are in fact an insight into our fallible nature.[33] As the laud had opened with the poetic "I" laying out the tension between

[28]Bonaventure, *De triplici via*, "Prologus," *Opera omnia* 8.3. See also *Breviloquium* 2.8, "De confirmatione bonorum angelorum," *Opera omnia* 5.223. In *Itinerarium* 4, *Opera omnia* 5.307, Bonaventure speaks of our "hierarchicus spiritus." There is a similar expression ("mentis humana hierarchizata") in *Collatio in Hexaëmeron XX*, *Opera Omnia* 5.429. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 209c–d, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York 1987): "Purification, illumination, and perfection are all three the reception of an understanding of the Godhead, namely, being completely purified of ignorance by the proportionately granted knowledge of the more perfect initiations, being illuminated by this same divine knowledge ..., and being also perfected by this light in the understanding of the most lustrous initiations." Cf. David Carpenter, *Revelation, History, and the Dialogue of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY 1995) 105–114.

[29]In the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure first summarizes the distinction between "vestigium," "imago," and "similitudo" at the end of the prologue, *Opera omnia* 5.296. Cf. *Itinerarium* 2.7, *Opera omnia* 5.301; *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. XXIV, q. 1, *Opera omnia* 2.561. For a synthesis of Bonaventure's three forms of image, see Gilson, *La philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (n. 26 above) 307; McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (n. 1 above) 107.

[30]*Itinerarium* 4.2 and 4.3, *Opera omnia* 5.306–307. Cf. *Breviloquium*, 5.4, *Opera omnia* 5.256.

[31]*Itinerarium* 4, *Opera omnia* 5.306. Cf. *Sententiarum libri II*, dist. XVII, dub. 4, *Opera omnia* 2.428.

[32]Agide Gottardi details the connection between stanzas 5 through 9 and chap. 15 of the *Commentarius in Sapientiam* (*Opera Omnia* 5.6.205) in "L'albero spirituale in Iacopone da Todi"(n. 24 above) 25.

[33]For the distinction between angelic and divine communications, see *Sententiarum libri II*, dist. X, q. 2, *Opera omnia* 2.271. Bonaventure writes that, although an angel usually speaks to the physical senses, God

intellect and desire, between silence and expression, so does the higher section of the concordant man/tree (its branches) move through the internal reactions toward a superior communication: purgation (angels), the recognition of an essential desire (archangels), and perfection (authorities).[34] Let us bear in mind that, according to Dionysius and Bonaventure, every angelic being in fact "purifies, enlightens, and perfects."[35]

It is essential to understand, however, that in this laud the three levels of Bonaventure's "hierarchic" mind apply both to the three angelic beings within each hierarchy and to the three hierarchies themselves.[36] Reading this section of Jacopone's laud we cannot help but perceive a rhythmic variation of an intrinsically similar pattern. Each angelic presence at once announces and symbolizes a new step in the mind's process of purgation, illumination, and perfection.[37] If the first rank speaks to the mind's will (a sudden angelic communication that triggers an overwhelming longing for the Word, vv. 119–120), the second set of angels addresses the intellect. In particular, Jacopone's description of the second hierarchy echoes Bonaventure's second sermon of *De sanctis angelis*, according to which the dominions precede both the principalities and the powers, who transpose the mind to the final hierarchy. Thanks to the second hierarchy, the concordant man/tree comes to dominate the senses' misleading allures and to defeat (through the angelic powers) the vices' diabolical temptations (vv. 159–160).[38]

If humility is signified by the roots of the concordant man/tree, the third hierarchy is the actual foundation of the whole tree (v. 184), as though its highest branches and its roots coincided, that is, as though the mind's climbing had been a digging into the

may grant an intellectual insight through an angelic messenger. In the conclusion of the previous *quaestio*, Bonaventure had distinguished between divine, angelic, and human expression. For Bonaventure, angelic expression differs both from God's and humans'. If God's idiom is in fact a revelation, human expression requires both an act and a sign. Angels perform a linguistic act, but do not make use of any physical sign (*Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. X, q. 1, *Opera omnia* 2.268–269). Cf. Richard of St. Victor, *The Mystical Ark*, book 5.13, in *The Twelve Patriarchs. The Mystical Ark. Book Three of the Trinity*, trans. Grover A. Zinn, (New York 1979) 330.

[34]Bonaventure offers a basic analysis of the angelic hierarchies in *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. IX, *Opera omnia* 2.237–241. As far as the second and the third hierarchy are concerned, Bonaventure points out the differences between Dyonisius, Bernard, and Gregory (2.240). In *The Celestial Hierarchy* Dionysius divides the three orders as follows: seraphim, cherubim, thrones; dominions, powers, authorities; principalities, archangels, angels. Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione ad Eugenium Papam* in *Tractatus et Opuscula*, ed. Jean Leclercq (Rome 1963), 4.7–10, 471–475; *On the Song of Songs 1*, trans. Kilian Walsh Ocso (Kalamazoo, MI 1981), sermon 19 ("The Loves of the Angels") 140–146. According to Bernard, the angelic hierarchies are angels, archangels, authorities (or virtues); powers, principalities, dominions; thrones, cherubim, seraphim. Cf. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium* 4, *Opera omnia* 5.307; *Soliloquium* 4, *Opera omnia* 5.61; *Collatio in Hexaëmeron XX*, *Opera omnia* 5.440–441; *Breviloquium* 2.8, *Opera omnia* 5.225.

[35]*Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. X, q. 2, *Opera omnia* 2.265; *The Celestial Hierarchy* (n. 28 above) 3.165c–168b, 7.208bcd.

[36]In his description of the first hierarchy, Jacopone reminds us that, interpreting Bonaventure, the angels respond to the Holy Spirit (vv. 99–100); the archangels relate to the Word (vv. 107–108); and the authorities are under the aegis of the Father (v. 127). Cf. *Collatio in Hexaëmeron XXI*, *Opera omnia* 5.434; Gilson, *La philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (n. 26 above) 214–215.

[37]Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy* (n. 28 above) 240b, 167.

[38]In the second sermon of *De sanctis angelis*, Bonaventure states that, if the dominions protect us against our physical appetites, the powers help us fight the devil's temptations (*Opera omnia* 9.619). Cf. Gottardi, "'L'albero spirituale' in Iacopone da Todi" (n. 24 above) 14. Bonaventure reiterates the same concept in *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. IX, *Opera omnia* 2.240. In his commentary on the *Song of Songs* (sermon 19), Bernard also believes that "[powers] are gifted with the power to overthrow and subdue the hostile power of demons" (141).

concordant man's roots. The final "concordance," the key term of the whole conclusive stanzas, reproduces the three-part mental evolution one more time. The speaker explains that the highest "concordance" ("concordia," vv. 187–188) is founded on the thrones, who prevent the mind from falling prey to its "discordance" ("descordia," v. 196).[39] But no concordance, the speaker says, can survive without knowledge's support (vv. 201–202), which is granted by the cherubim (v. 205).[40] Reaching the highest branch/root, the mind has a vision of the seraphim, who are an "enflamed living for love" ("lo 'nfocato viver per amanza," v. 216). This concordant fire, this constant burning "consumes" charity (v. 220). In the concordant man/tree, we may thus say, charity is a flame consumed by the seraphic fire.

Attaining his perfect and final concordance, the man/tree thus acquires an angelic nature, a seraphic flame that burns the man's highest/deepest branches. Jacopone also underscores that the concordant man's angelic flame at once consumes and is consumed by charity. Jacopone borrows the concept of a human/angelic order from Bonaventure, who theorizes the existence of a tenth angelic class in *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*:

> Beyond the nine angelic orders it is necessary to add a tenth order made of those human beings who were saved by Christ and thus became part of the tenth order, even though during their life they did not deserve such an excellence.[41]

It is important to keep in mind that, according to Jacopone, the seraphic fire granted to the concordant man/tree is a perennial gift ("così sempremai lo va tenendo," v. 219). In other words, Jacopone posits a "concordance" between Bonaventure's tenth angelic order and the man/tree consumed by the fire of charity. The linguistic implications of this ontological hybrid (a man/angel) will become apparent at the end of this essay.

Jacopone reiterates and clarifies the connection between human and angelic being in laud 84, one of his highest artistic accomplishments. At the beginning, the poet states that contemplation is based on a double procedure. The reader ("O tu, om," v. 9) must first turn to the "teaching tree" ("l'arbor che t'ensegna") and then must consider ("pun cura") the nine angelic orders (v. 13). Addressing the reader, Jacopone reminds him that, thanks to his noble nature, man is certainly capable of reaching the angels' height (vv. 14–15). To have a clear understanding of this laud, it is essential to remember that, according to the *Itinerarium*, the nine angelic orders correspond to three distinct levels of the soul. The first three pertain to human race; the next three relate to the soul's effort toward perfection, and the final three concern divine grace.[42] We will see that Jacopone's poetic description respects this fundamental distinction.

[39]Cf. Pseudo-Dyonisius, *Celestial Hierarchy* (n. 28 above): "The title of the most sublime and exalted thrones conveys that in them there is a transcendence over every earthly defect ... that they are forever separated from what is inferior" (205d); Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. IX, *Opera omnia* 2.240. Bonaventure writes that the highest hierarchy entails a triple act and a triple gift ("triplex actum et triplex donum, scilicet *tentionis, cognitionis* et *dilectionis*").

[40]Cf. Pseudo-Dyonisius, *Celestial Hierarchy* (n. 28 above) 205b; Richard of St. Victor, *The Mystical Ark* (n. 33 above) 4.5: "[I]f 'cherubim' means 'fullness of knowledge,' see how rightly the last product of our work, in which the supreme stages of all knowledge are expressed in a symbolic figure, is named 'cherubim'" (265).

[41]*Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. IX, q. 7, *conclusio*, *Opera omnia* 2.254.

Laud 84 is unquestionably the most complex and ambitious composition of Jacopone's *canzoniere*. In the act of contemplating the three angelic levels, the mind realizes that the tree of love is in fact a set of three trees, one placed on top of the other. Each tree embodies a different theological virtue, and each virtue is linked to one angelic hierarchy.[43] Before we proceed, we must mention other fundamental differences between lauds 77 and 84. In laud 84, the description of the mystical ascension is much more specific, for the passage from one order to another entails a set of three branches. In other words, the three-step process of mystical enlightenment (purgation, illumination, perfection) is here multiplied by three; that is, the process is reproduced within each order of each hierarchy. In this highly detailed text, the narrator's autobiography also bears important connections with the apocalyptic images and themes of Bonaventure's *Legenda maior*. This is a second point of difference between the two poems. In fact, laud 84 could be seen as Jacopone's mystical rewriting of the *Poverello*'s canonical biography, which is also the direct source of laud 40, a much more straightforward summary of Francis's biography. If in Bonaventure's *Arbor vitae* the tree of life identifies with the incarnate Word, in laud 84 Francis is both the perfect "hierarchic" man and God's perfect "similitude."[44] We may say that, for Jacopone, salvation is a form of mirroring or reflection in that The Word reveals his idiom of salvation through Francis, His most perfect similitude. Francis is at once the restored tree of wisdom through which we climb toward the Word and the most perfect reflection of the Word's image itself. After his death, Francis has not abandoned his brothers. He lives as a visible language (an angelic similitude), a reflection we carry within ourselves.[45]

But by connecting his poem to Bonaventure's biography, Jacopone also brings to the fore the apocalyptic connotation of Francis's angelic nature. Let us remember that the very first sentence of the *Legenda maior* directly states that "in these last days the grace of God our Savior has appeared in his servant Francis."[46] Moreover, Bonaventure compares Francis to the angel of the sixth seal, thus "giv[ing] Francis a very important place in the history of salvation."[47] In Bonaventure's words:

> [N]ot without reason is he [Francis] considered to be symbolized by the image of the Angel who ascends from the sunrise bearing the seal of the living God, in the true prophecy of that other friend of the Bridegroom, John the Apostle and Evangelist. For "when the sixth seal was opened," John says in the Apocalypse, "I saw another Angel ascending

[42] *Itinerarium* 4.4, *Opera omnia* 5.307.

[43] On the three theological virtues, see *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum III*, dist. XXV–XXVII, *Opera omnia* 3.534–635.

[44] For Bonaventure, Francis is the quintessential "hierarchic man, [who] was lifted up in a fiery chariot." See the prologue to Bonaventure's *Legenda maior*. I quote from the following translation: Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey Into God. The Tree of Life. The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York 1978) 180.

[45] Cf. Emmerson and Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (n. 19 above) 46.

[46] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, prologue (n. 44 above) 179.

[47] Emmerson and Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (n. 19 above) 37. Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York 1985) 128: "references to the angel of the sixth seal leave no doubt that Bonaventure believed he had already come in the person of Francis."

from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God."[48]

We could certainly interpret this laud as Jacopone's description of the progressive acquirement of the angelic seal.[49] In the conclusive section of Jacopone's poem, the seal granted by the sixth angel of the Apocalypse is like a shield ("scudo") the angelic man uses in a final confrontation with a horde of vices.

Probably alluding to a lost picture accompanying the text, at the beginning of laud 84 Jacopone explains that penance is the very first branch of the tree of faith. "As it appears" (or "as it is apparent," v. 28), the poet went to Rome to enact his penance (second branch). However, his encounter with the order of Angels took place when he finally embraced poverty as the natural completion (third branch, perfection) of his process of penance (v. 34). Bonaventure writes in the prologue to his biography that God appears through Francis only to the "truly humble and lovers of poverty."[50] Penance is also the first branch of the second set, which leads the mind to the order of the archangels. The poet tells us that he moved from penance up to prayer and finally to the branch of humility (v. 46). According to Jacopone, the mind's ascension is in fact a spiral movement, according to which at every third branch the mind seems to fall back into a deeper form of penance/purgation, which consequently activates a superior illumination. Moving up through the final three branches that take the mind to the thrones, the narrator first encounters all sorts of humiliation. When he then reaches the eighth step, thanks to his great devotion he becomes able to make the crippled walk (vv. 59–60). But at the ninth branch he realizes that this gift had been a demonic temptation. "Accompanied by the thrones," he enters a new phase of repentance.[51] Poverty, humility, and penance are the three qualities granted by the first tree. Climbing the first tree, we could synthesize, the mystic completes a process of inner purgation.

The passage from the tree of faith, which "goes beyond the starry sky" (v. 19), to the second (hope) occurs when the speaker realizes that his physicality still prevents him from fulfilling his longing for the Word. To climb up the tree of hope, the speaker needs to shed the memory of his own self, the ballast or skin that still keeps him down. As we have already seen, if the first branch always corresponds to an initial recognition (purgation), the second usually coincides with a turning point in the subject's mystical journey. In one of the most intense passages of his entire *canzoniere*, Jacopone writes that the second level of the tree of hope is a blossoming branch bearing the fruit of love (vv. 92–94).[52] We will see later that Jacopone uses a similar image in

[48]Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, prologue (n. 44 above) 181.

[49]Emmerson and Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (n. 19 above) 45: "[T]hose who came to be called Spiritual Franciscans understood the 'sealed' and therefore saved remnant to be a small and exclusive group, namely themselves. Bonaventure, on the other hand, rejected the notion that the remnant were an already chosen specific group."

[50]Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, prologue (n. 44 above) 179.

[51]Cf. Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 1.6 (n. 44 above) 188–189. Bonaventure recounts Francis's encounter with the leper and his longing for solitary places: "From that time on he clothed himself with a spirit of poverty, a sense of humility and a feeling of intimate devotion" (189). But Francis's first miracle is in chap. 2, sect. 6, 195.

[52]In Bonaventure's *Arbor vitae*, the tree of life has twelve branches, each of them bearing a fruit. This fruit, which "is one and undivided," "is offered to God's servants to be tasted so that when they eat it, they

laud 78, also focused on the tree metaphor. In both cases, tears nourish the fruit born from the branch of love (laud 84, vv. 93–96; laud 78, vv. 87–90).

It is important to note that no other branch of Jacopone's mystical trees is blooming; no other branch bears fruits. In Jacopone's mysticism, the flower and fruit of the tree of hope is the gift of forgiveness.[53] Meeting the order of the dominions (v. 102), the mystic is cleansed of the memory of his past self (his sinfulness) and acquires a "great certainty" (v. 104). But, again, this inner stability is only temporary, for at the beginning of the next level the enemy "obscures" the mind (v. 106), throwing the mystic into a state of utter despair. A topos of mystical and hagiographic literature, Satan makes himself visible only when the mind has achieved an essential understanding of its past self and has been justified by divine love. In this case, illumination (the second branch) is a dream that both shows and unveils the enemy's real presence (v. 112). This vision/dream leads the mind to the realization (the branch of perfection) that the world itself is ruled and besieged by the enemy. If the previous set of three branches had erased the memory of the self, on these subsequent branches the mind turns to the cross as the remembrance of an eternal (personal and universal) salvation. The principalities grant this "eternal glory" (v. 124).

The mind "doubles" its inner glory when it moves up to the seventh branch (v. 126). The mystic is now able to recognize the enemy's allures, even though they have become much more insidious. Indeed, on this seventh branch Satan appears to the mind in the form of an angel asking the mystic "to restore" a church (vv. 131–132). The reference to Bonaventure's biography of the *Poverello* is here evident.[54] However, what in the *Legenda maior* was a clear sign of God's grace, in Jacopone's mystical poem turns into a demonic temptation. Francis's biography being the most faithful "similitude" of the Word's message of salvation, Satan knows that the mystic may interpret his diabolical request as the reenactment of Francis's path to spiritual enlightenment. This stage or branch of mystical initiation indeed nullifies every visual and verbal reference or remembrance. The final confrontation with the enemy is a dialogue, in which Satan speaks as Christ (second branch) and as "an angel of light" (third branch). The mystic replies to the devil's flattering and false rhetoric with a prayer to the divinity. In this crucial final moment of its mystical learning, the mind discards the intrigues of memory (Francis's referential experience). After three failed attempts, the devil withdraws from the mind's sight and the mystic is finally able to reach the ninth branch, that of contemplation (v. 156).

Meeting the order of the powers, the mind shatters.[55] The third tree, Jacopone ex-

may always be satisfied, yet never grow weary of its taste" (Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 3 ([n.44 above] 120–121).

[53]Cf. Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 3.6 (n. 44 above) 202: "One day while he was weeping as he *looked back over his past years in bitterness* (Isa. 38.15), the joy of the Holy Spirit came over him and he was assured that all of his sins had been completely forgiven."

[54]Cf. Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 2.1 (n. 44 above) 191: "One day when Francis *went out to meditate in the fields* (Gen. 24.63), he walked beside the church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse because of extreme age." There the divinity asks him to "repair" his house. Emphasis in the text.

[55]Pseudo-Dyonisius, *Celestial Hierarchy* (n. 28 above) 237d–240a: "As for the holy 'powers,' the title refers to a kind of masculine and unshakable courage in all its godlike activities. It is a courage which abandons all laziness and softness during the reception of the divine enlightenment." The powers' combative nature accompanies the mind to its final confrontation with the forces of evil in the third heaven.

plains, is in fact the third heaven. Its pure splendor floods the mind and erases (the tree of) hope. If the first tree (faith) had staged the initial process of inner purgation (founded on poverty, humility, and penance) and the second (hope) had described how penance engenders an intellectual enlightenment (the subjugation of memory), the final tree/heaven (charity) signifies the fulfillment of the mind's mystical journey. The religious references behind Jacopone's third tree/heaven are unequivocal. In the *Legenda maior*, Bonaventure writes that, like Paul, Francis himself was once rapt in spirit and taken to the third heaven.[56] But, according to Bonaventure's account, Francis was both a second Paul and "a second Elijah." As Emmerson and Herzman remind us, "[l]ike Elijah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, [Francis] foresaw future events.... Like Elijah, who ... is expected to precede the Messiah and restore all (Mal. 4.5–6; Matt. 17.11), Francis is a forerunner of Christ."[57] One Saturday, while Francis was on his way to Assisi to preach in the cathedral the following day, his brothers took shelter in an abandoned hut on the outskirts of town. In Bonaventure's words:

> At about midnight a fiery chariot of wonderful brilliance entered through the door of the house.... [T]hey realized that by supernatural power the Lord had shown him to them in this glowing *chariot of fire* (4 Kings 2.11) ... so that they might follow him.... Like a second Elijah, God had made him *a chariot and a charioteer* for spiritual men (4 Kings 2.12).... God *opened the eyes* (John 9:32) of these simple men ... just as he had once *opened the eyes* of the servant of Elisha so that he could see *the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about the prophet* (4 Kings 6.17).[58]

In the final section of his laud, Jacopone blends the stories of Elijah, Elisha, Paul, and Francis into one mystical account. If Francis is a second Elijah, the early Franciscans "are likened to Elisha, the first follower of Elijah."[59] According to Jacopone, the third tree/heaven is in fact a mountain the mystic ascends riding a horse (vv. 169 and 173). Echoing the episode of Elisha against the Aramaean army, on his way up toward the third heaven/tree the mystic fights and defeats the enemies (nine basic sins as nine alternative angelic encounters) awaiting him on top of each of the final nine branches or "stages," as Jacopone also calls them ("grado," v. 189). Similar to a mystery play, each of the three levels leading to the angelic authorities takes up the form of three personified sins (first branch: sloth, gluttony, lust; second branch: vanity, ire, avarice; third branch: ignorance, pride, greed).[60]

The final two branches of the tree of charity are of essential importance. Having cast off every form of sin, the mind now proceeds toward the two highest angelic orders. If through branch four and branch five divine grace finally takes hold of the

[56]Bonaventure mentions Paul's mystical experience in the prologue to the *Itinerarium*, *Opera omnia* 5.295.

[57]Emmerson and Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (n. 19 above) 50.

[58] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 4.4 (n. 44 above) 209. Emphasis in the text. Cf. 2 Kings 2.11: "Now as they [Elijah and Elisha] walked on, talking as they went, a chariot of fire appeared and horses of fire coming between the two of them; and Elijah went up to heaven in the whirlwind."

[59]Emmerson and Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (n. 19 above) 67.

[60]Pseudo-Dyonisius, *Celestial Hierarchy* (n. 28 above) 240a–b: "The holy 'Authorities' ... can receive God in a harmonious and unconfused way and indicate the ordered nature of the celestial and intellectual authority" (167). The authorities (or "virtues") are usually part of the first or the second hierarchy. In laud 84, Jacopone gives the authorities the position usually attributed to the thrones (see laud 77).

mind, on branch six the mind's "potentia cognitiva" ("potenza," v. 251) and its "potentia affectiva" ("voluntate," v. 252) at last become "concordant" (v. 251). At the beginning of this essay, we noticed a similar reference in the opening section of laud 77.[61] In both lauds, "concordance" signifies a perfect inner agreement between the soul's faculties and divine will. At this stage of spiritual enlightenment, the mind encounters the cherubim and "sees God as Truth" ("vede Deo per veretate," v. 256).[62] As we pointed out in our analysis of laud 77, a concordant human being (Francis, Paul) is a "similitude" of the divinity.

In his interpretation of the last three branches/stages accompanying the soul to the Seraphim, Jacopone underscores the essentially linguistic nature of the highest part of the tree of charity. If in the prologue of laud 77 speech was still "a great folly" because of its inherent temptations (v. 6), at the end of laud 84 it becomes the sole means through which the mind may ascend to the vision of the seraphim. For the mystic, to preach the good news is the natural manifestation of his "hierarchic concordance," thanks to which he is now able to converse with the angels themselves (eighth branch, vv. 264–265). In other words, human linguistic expression now mirrors the concordant dialogue between the hierarchic human being and the angelic orders. This is the most eloquent manifestation of what Bonaventure calls the "diffusion" ("diffusio") of angelic charity.[63] If every angelic communication limits itself to announcing God's wisdom and will, the mystic's concordant language itself has turned into an audible echo of a superior and silent idiom. Let us remember that, according to the *Legenda maior*, in a prophetic dream a priest called Sylvester once saw

> the whole town of Assisi encircled by a huge dragon (Dan. 14.22) which threatened to destroy the entire area by its enormous size. Then he saw coming from Francis's mouth a golden cross whose top touched heaven and whose arms stretched far and wide and seemed to extend to the ends of the world.[64]

Jacopone directly refers to the "golden cross" ("una croc' ennaurata," v. 47) appearing from Francis's mouth in laud 40. The hierarchic man, "speaks the cross," that is, the "Verbum incarnatum" pronounces his presence through the hierarchic man's mouth.[65] If Francis, the second Elijah, spoke/embodied the Word's message as a true messenger of the Apocalypse, Jacopone's laud is at once memorial and invocation, hagiographic narration and prayer. As we pointed out at the beginning of his essay, this is the essential meaning of this form of religious poetry. In laud 84 the narrator, a man who has just climbed the three trees of salvation and now fears to fall from their highest branch, is not Francis, but rather a hypothetical "us" who will absorb/has absorbed

[61]See n. 12.

[62]Speaking of the contemplative mind, in the *Itinerarium* 5.1, Bonaventure divides the cherubim into two angelic beings that mirror each other. These two sets of cherubim embody two kinds of contemplation: "By these Cherubim we understand the two modes or stages of contemplating the invisible and eternal things of God: one is concerned with the essential attributes of God and the other with those proper to the Persons." (Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* [n. 44 above] 94).

[63]*Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, dist. X, q. 1, *Opera omnia* 2.264.

[64]Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 3.5 (n. 44 above) 201–202.

[65]In Bonaventure's words, Francis spoke "as if an angel of the Lord were speaking" (*The Life of St. Francis* 12.12 [n. 44 above] 301).

Francis's words and is asked to share them with the rest of us (his brothers and sisters).

According to Jacopone, the mystic's concordant dialogue both with other human beings and the angels allows him to reach the highest branch of the third tree and to turn into a seraphic flame (v. 275). As we read at the end of laud 77, the seraphim burn on the fire of charity. But charity, we have learned from Bonaventure, is the purest "diffusion" of the entire angelic chorus, which finds in the seraphim its highest manifestation. If charity is what the concordant being expresses, it is obvious that his enlightenment (his seraphic flame) cannot be a private, solipsistic event. Jacopone asks the "man who has attained such a power" ("Omo che iogne a tal possanza," v. 281) to pray both for him, the writer, and the reader. The concordant being's dialogue with the angels and the Word in fact occurs as a request on behalf of others, as Jacopone clarifies at the conclusion of this laud. To pray for "us" indeed "honors" the mystic himself ("per tua onoranza," v. 282) in that to speak for "us," to speak on our behalf to the divinity is nothing but the visible manifestation of the mystic's "concordant fire."

It is thus evident that in Jacopone's mysticism no intrinsic contradiction subsists between silence and language, between contemplation and expression. A concordant man being a hybrid (both human and angelic, according to Bonaventure), his language itself is at once echo and expression, an audible reflection of a silent statement. We could say that a concordant man's language is a dialogue involving the angels, the divinity, and "us," those for whom the seraphic man burns and speaks. In Jacopone's mystical system, we must thus distinguish between two kinds of expression, the first preceding and the second following the ascent of the tree of charity. When it becomes purified on the flame of the seraphic fire, language turns into a form of dialogic contemplation that exists between the meditative "I" and the "us" at whom the fire of charity is directed. Let us remember that, as Bonaventure reiterates in *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum II*, angelic language differs from human beings' in that it is an "internal discourse" ("verbum interius") transcending every physical sign.[66] To perceive an angelic discourse means to receive his message without hearing any syllable or reading any sentence. But how can a human being express such an idiom? A hierarchic man has made himself into a perfect divine messenger. He still expresses himself through visible and audible signs, but his communication has become a perfect echo of God's silent, unspoken words. Francis is of course the primary example of this seraphic speaker. However, as the references to the *Legenda maior* have shown, Jacopone knows that the acquisition of this angelic idiom is a divine gift, and that at any moment pride and conceit may infect any expression not fully "burned" by charity.[67] Let us remember that God's request to Francis to restore His house becomes a demonic temptation in Jacopone. How can the concordant man know when and if he

[66]See n. 18.

[67]In the *Tractatus utilissimus* attributed to Jacopone, we find a similar concern. Some truly devout men "at times" ("aliquando") perceive a "divine sweetness" ("divinam dulcedinem") during their prayers. However, when they resume speaking with other people, they seem to forget God's presence. In Jacopone's words, these men are like "flies" ("musca"s), who are unable to distinguish between honey and spit. I quote from the following edition: Enrico Menestò, *Le prose latine attribuite a Jacopone da Todi* (Bologna 1979)

has attained the "albedo" of language—as alchemists would say—the mercurial (angelic) idiom that utters the silence of the Word's charity?

Jacopone rephrases this essential concern at the beginning of laud 78, also centered on the tree image. If in laud 77 the tree signifies a concordant man and in laud 84 the three trees are the three theological virtues, in laud 78 "love" is the name of God's tree (vv. 1–2). The poem opens with the same mistrust toward language we noticed at the beginning of laud 77. Responding to a man still "down on earth in the dark" ("en terra ottenebrato," v. 6), a man who has climbed the tree of love fears that narrating his ascension will make him fall off the tree, for his condition is still "very tempestuous" (vv. 9–10). In Bonaventure's biography of the *Poverello,* Francis himself expresses a similar concern:

> In this matter it happened that he fell into a great struggle over a doubt which, after many days of prayer, he proposed for resolution to the friars who were close to him. "What do you think, brothers, ... [t]hat I should spend my time in prayer or that I should go about preaching?[68]

In Bonaventure's fictional description, Francis is uncertain whether he should "address God, listen to him and dwell among the angels" or preach the Word to us.[69] "In preaching," Francis muses, "we get dust on our spiritual feet."[70] However, Francis realizes that, if the Word himself (the *Verbum increatum*) "came down from the *bosom of the Father* ... to speak the *word* of salvation to men," he must "hold back for himself absolutely nothing" and communicate the good news to us.

As we have seen, in his lauds Jacopone comes to a similar conclusion. If laud 84 works as a sermon delivered by a concordant "I" urging the reader to follow his mystical ascension, laud 78 opens as a dialogue—the typical structure of Jacopone's poems—in which the same enlightened "I" is reluctant to share his mystical insight. But the one who is still in the dark (the "us" at the end of laud 84) reminds the concordant man that he has no merit in his spiritual accomplishment ("Ia non è tua questa istoria," v. 11). His successful ascension is not due to his personal skills, but rather to God's unfathomable decision. The concordant man's mystical insight, the "us" still in the dark underscores, is a divine gift. The mystic is thus bound to speak, in that his account will at once support "us" in our spiritual growth and glorify God's wisdom. The concordant man's words, we may say, do not entirely belong to him. Having acquired an angelic nature, his language is his and not his at the same time.[71] But this linguistic duality is what plagues the mystic's mind and makes his stay on the love tree so "tempestuous." The mystic's final decision to share his experience in fact derives from the dialogic character of his insight. He will speak both to praise God and to befriend "us" ("per avermete per amico," v. 21). Love is at once the origin, the theme, and the outcome of the mystic's account.

The tree of love is structurally similar to the previous two mystical trees (the tree of

78.

[68]Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 12.1 (n. 44 above) 291.

[69]Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 12.1 (n. 44 above) 292.

[70]Ibid.

[71]On the issue of angelic language, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa,* pt. qq. 57–58.

the hierarchic man and the three trees of the theological virtues). Like the other two trees, the love tree originates from humility, here depicted as a small branch bending downward (v. 35–38). Let us remember that the hierarchic man's tree was grounded on humility and humility was also the gift granted by the first tree of the three theological virtues. An important difference between this laud and the previous two is that here verbal and written signals lead the mystic up through the twelve branches of the love tree. Although linguistic interactions between the mystic and angels are present in the previous poems too, in laud 78 they play a prominent role in the mind's spiritual process. Indeed, the mystic ascends from the first to the second branch only when a voice tells him that he will not be able to climb this tree unless he gets rid of all his mortal sins (vv. 41–42).

A second angelic message accompanies the mind from the second to the third branch. An angelic voice orders the mystic to cross himself and grab the "branch of light" (vv. 56–58), which takes the mind to the actual encounter with his divine spouse's light (v. 74). It should be clear by now that this poem, like the previous two, envisions a mystical ascension according to a series of three-step stages. In this laud, the "perfection" attained through the third branch leads the mystic to recognize how deeply love has changed him (fourth branch, v. 75–77). Through the intermediate branch carrying the name "perseverance" (v. 81), the mind reaches the sixth branch, called "constant love" ("amore continuato," v. 82). These brief angelic communications continue at the higher levels of the love tree. On the seventh branch the mystic sees some fruits marked with a written description of love's tears ("de poma scripte ce pendia:/ le lacreme c'Amor facia," v. 88–89). Whereas in laud 84 the fruit of love signified the "illumination" granted to the mind on the second branch of the hope tree, in laud 78 Jacopone identifies the fruits signed with love's tears with an initial moment of purgation. According to this second interpretation, after reading/seeing the tears of love (that is, after recognizing his own past as sin and love's forgiveness), the mystic climbs up the eighth branch, called the "branch of fervor" ("lo ramo de l'ardore," v. 92). On the ninth branch, a message tells him that self-hatred is essential to attain perfection (v. 99).

The final three branches of the love tree mirror the final level of spiritual enlightenment described both in 77 and 84. Having been cleansed of every form of sin, the mind enters a state of perfect contemplation. We have noticed, though, a difference between laud 77 and laud 84 in the choice of the angelic order accompanying the mind to the cherubim and finally to the seraphim. Whereas in laud 84 the mind moves from the authorities (final branch of the tree of hope) to the powers (third branch of the tree of charity), in laud 77 the mystic leaves the authorities for the thrones, who then accompany him to the last two orders. But of course in all three lauds the seraphim welcome the mind at its final stage of annihilation. Instead of depicting this mental erasure as a flame, in laud 78 Jacopone chooses the image of a (seraphic) branch piercing the mystic's heart (vv. 117–118). This conclusive and perennial wound "drowns" the heart in an overwhelming insight (v. 126).

Concluding his narration, the concordant man reminds the man "down here" that he has shared his experience with him in order to praise the Lord (vv. 126–127). As the hierarchic man has offered his heart to the seraphic fire (the final branch of the love

tree), so must the "us" still down here open our hearts to the mystic's words (vv. 129–130). The concordant man's speech thus works like an angelic flame/branch reaching/piercing the listener's heart.[72] In Jacopone's mystical system based on a process of angelic disclosures, charity is a fire flowing from the highest branch of the "tree of contemplation" (v. 131) down to the "us" still longing for enlightenment. Being the idiom shared by the whole creation, charity moves from the Word to the angels, to the concordant human being, and finally to the "us" on earth. As Alexander Gerken reminds us, in Bonaventure's theology Jesus Christ (*Verbum incarnatum*) perfectly embodies the function of the Word (*Verbum increatum*), thanks to whom charity reaches both the angelic beings and the concordant men.[73] Let us remember that, if Jacopone's three versions of the mystical tree work as hypothetical biographies of the hierarchic man, Bonaventure's *Arbor vitae* unfolds as the biography of the incarnate Word.

This essay has attempted to bring to the fore the essential coherence of Jacopone's mystical system. As we have seen in the analysis of the three lauds based on the tree image, Jacopone is convinced that no actual dichotomy exists between silence and expression, between contemplation and communication. The clichéd image of the mystic shunning verbal expression does not apply to Jacopone. For Jacopone, the "concordant" language, that is, the language burned or pierced by the seraphic flame, has a distinct apocalyptic nature and is the most cogent expression of the Word's message of salvation. As the hierarchic man explains in the laud on the love tree, "to utter the Word" means to speak to "us," to the reader still distant from any form of angelic enlightenment. We have pointed out that in laud 84 the mind is able to move from the cherubim to the seraphim only after having preached the Word's word to the world.

But a final essential question arises at this point. What is the relationship between the language of Francis, the sixth angel of the Apocalypse and the second Elijah, and the poetic expression of Jacopone? Although for most scholars the most innovative aspect of Jacopone's poetry is its personal, autobiographical character, his *Lauds* can be truly understood only if read as a communal response to a state of emergency. How can the Spirituals, the first and most faithful followers of the "concordant" man, carry on the prophet's message of salvation, given that the end of time is approaching? How to preserve his angelic idiom? The poetic form of the laud serves this purpose. A laud about Francis and his mystical ascension is also a prayer to Francis as second Christ. If the end is imminent, Jacopone's lauds are not different from the anonymous lauds recited and chanted throughout the Italian peninsula at the time. After his death, Francis's angelic language has not disappeared. To learn Francis's idiom is first and foremost an act of grace we may acquire through charity and prayer. Jacopone's lauds in fact insert Francis's biography into a divine project of revelation and salvation. No difference thus exists between an anonymous laud on the Virgin and Jacopone's lauds on Francis as a mystical tree. Jacopone's lauds remind us that, as the incarnate Word

[72]Cf. Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* 12.7 (n. 44 above) 297: "[H]is word was like a burning fire penetrating the innermost depths of the heart."

[73]Alexander Gerken OFM, *Theologie des Wortes. Das Verhältnis von Schöpfung und Incarnation bei Bonaventura* (Düsseldorf 1963) 311–312. Referring in particular to the *Breviloquium* (third part of the prologue, *Opera omnia* 5.204–205), Gerken writes that the "*Funktion des Wortes*" is so essentially manifested in the Savior that in some of Bonaventure's treatises it is difficult to distinguish the *Verbum incarnatum* and

died for all of us on the cross, a second man burned on the seraphic fire to renew and continue God's revelation. Both the Word and the seraphic man will live among us until the end of the world.

Department of Romance Languages and Literatures
University of Chicago
1050 E. 59th Street
Chicago, IL 60637

the *Verbum increatum*.